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THE VAGRANT
— OF —
LOVER'S LEAP,

— BY —
JOHN T. BRODERICK.

The Vagrant of Lover's Leap,

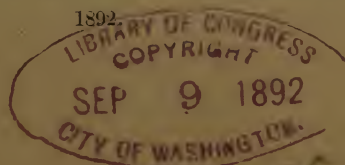
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P R E F A C E .

I hope that the following narrative, however unattractive its subject may appear, will not be considered devoid of poetic merit. At the same time, my chief aim in writing it was not to please the æsthetic lover of poetry, but rather to paint a truthful picture. Doubtless, the reader can point to many of his acquaintances whose lives might be compared to that of "The Vagrant of Lover's Leap."

THE AUTHOR.

LYNN, MASS.

THE VAGRANT OF LOVER'S LEAP.

I.

An aged vagrant, foot-sore and forlorn,
Of abject mien, with garments old and torn,
One summer evening sat, in sorrow deep,
Beside a grassy knoll near Lover's Leap.
His eyes were downcast; his redundant hair
In locks neglected hung; long years of care
His brow had furrowed; and upon his face
Stern Want had left her melancholy trace.
With hopes all dead and dreams unrealized,
By friends forsaken, by the world despised,
He neared the end of life's allotted span,
The mournful, wretched remnant of a man.

Oft had I strolled, from all vexations free,
Round Lover's Leap in tranquil reverie;

Or, from that rock romantic towering high,
 Watched the sun sinking in the western sky.
 Fair is the Forest at the close of day
 Ere twilight spreads around its mantle gray.

But when I spied that weary, woeful wight,
 The charms of nature ceased to give delight.
 To me no stranger was he: I had learned
 How he had fared in life — how he had turned,
 Scourged by misfortune, from the walks of fame
 To tread the paths of poverty and shame,
 And pass in deep despair his lingering days,
 Reviled by those who once had voiced his praise.

The favored few, in selfish bliss secure,
 Behold, unmoved, the miseries of the poor;
 Nor can distressful tales disturb their ease
 Or rouse to life their drowsy sympathies.

The preachers, too, are chained to ancient creeds
 And blindly follow as Tradition leads.
 Convinced are they prophetic lips are sealed
 And no more truth to men shall be revealed.

To Christ in Heaven deep reverence they pay
But spurn the Christ that walks the earth to-day.

But some there are, with natures large and warm,
Whom yet distress can move, though pleasures charm,
Whose tender hearts are touched by human woe,
And throb with pity, or with kindness glow—
Impulsive souls by generous instincts ruled
And in the mean, unmanly arts unschooled.
With sympathetic interest these will read
This tale of sorrow, and its moral heed.



II.

That aged vagrant, needy now and sad,
Once nursed bright hopes and lived a happy lad.
Nor was the morning of his life misspent
In pleasure wholly, nor in dull content.
The love of justice, liberty and truth
Burned in the bosom of the ardent youth;
And, as his mind expanded year by year,
In fancy he beheld a mighty sphere—
The dwelling-place of men of kindred blood,
Who found their comfort in each other's good,
And peaceful lived, uncircumscribed by space,
As loving brothers of a common race—
A beautiful abode where every child
Was blest from birth, and every parent smiled,
Where no poor slaves of tyrants stood in awe,
And freedom sweetened toil, and love was law.

Oft to some spot secluded he retired
 To fan the flame a gentle soul had fired,—
 A being pure, whom lavish Love, unchecked,
 In Beauty's robes resplendent richly decked;
 And when the idol he adored was nigh
 His heart throbbed wildly and his pulse beat high.

In mute approval of the loving pair,
 Creation's face assumed a gladsome air.
 The stately trees threw off their sober mask,
 And graceful branches, nodding, seemed to ask
 Of one another sympathy. The meek
 Field daisies, fresh in bloom, appeared to speak
 In grateful language to the kindly dew
 That came to nurse their growth. In clusters grew
 The lilies fair, in various colors dressed,
 Wooed by the sun, by gentle winds carressed.
 The birds sang to their mates in joyous trills
 And filled the air with music sweet. The rills
 Rushed, gurgling, down the hill-sides to bestow
 Their kisses on the parching vales below;
 And e'en the twinkling planets, grouped above
 When darkness wrapped the earth, were types of love.

Ah yes, he loved, and early learned to woo,
 But the enraptured moments swiftly flew.
 Our joys are transient; they must needs be so;
 The gods we worship wink at human woe,
 And to another world confine the bliss
 That suffering man might fitly share in this.
 The soul, restricted to a narrow groove,
 Is robbed on earth of all the sweets of love;
 False maxims curb the warm heart's fond desires
 And chill the genial thoughts which love inspires.
 'Twere wrong, forsooth, to make existence dear
 By founding Christ's ideal kingdom here!
 How jealous would the angels grow, how sad
 Would Heaven become, if all the world were glad!
 Pathos and Poverty, that blessed pair,
 Must ever be preserved with tender care!
 If all were rich where beggars now abound,
 If labor's fruits were fairly spread around,
 If cruel want drove no fond fathers wild,
 And babes were all well-fed, and mothers smiled,
 The vengeful gods, with Calvinistic ire,
 Might scourge the blissful world by brimstone fire!

III.

The young man wedded; he was yet obscure,
His means were meagre and his prospects poor,
But now he longed to leave his lowly state
And share the comforts of the rich and great.
By nature quite unfit to relish life
With hungry offspring and a helpless wife,
The husband heeded Duty's earnest call
And he who once had soared now stooped to crawl.
Necessity, a tyrant cold and stern,
Gave to his dreamy mind a sordid turn;
On base concerns his thoughts began to dwell,
He studied how to shrewdly buy and sell,
Learned to deceive with skill, grew meanly wise
And bartered manhood for a paltry prize.
But, to attain the ends he had in view,
Alas! no cleaner course he could pursue;

For there were dear, dependent ones, who stood
In need of shelter and in need of food.
Affection strongly pressed him to the fray
And, right or wrong, his part was to obey.

Thus spurred, he entered the ignoble race
For wealth, for reputation, power and place.
Youth's holy aspirations all seemed vain,
For men prized nothing but material gain;
Craft was a virtue, noble deeds were rare
And "Mammon won where seraphs might despair."

With troubled conscience and a heavy heart,
He turned, reluctant, toward the busy mart:
Soon he was altered, soon the greed for gold
Destroyed his morals, turned his nature cold;
His tastes once so exalted grew depraved,
His mind was narrowed and his soul enslaved.

Success awaited, wealth and honor came;
The heralds echoed his distinguished name;
Sly sycophant's unstinted homage paid,

Within his reach the choicest gifts were laid;
 The cultured class warm words of praise expressed
 And at their homes he was a welcome guest;
 For he had risen from his humble state
 And riches gave him rank among the great.

Yes, honest worth is unrewarded now,
 The fairest laurels deck the nabob's brow;
 No more where Lincoln lived is manhood prized,
 Wealth wins its way where patriots are despised;
 No more on Freedom's soil is freedom found,
 The man with money is a king uncrowned.

Oh, mighty Money! man's most powerful stay,
 Great are thy uses, matchless is thy sway!
 How wondrous easy 'tis for thee to make
 A fool seem wise, a hero of a rake!
 Wide-spread are thy dominions; thy control
 Encompasses the earth from pole to pole.
 For thy dear sake the wise man apes the clown,
 For thee the statesman reaps a rogue's renown,
 The hireling judge betrays the people's trust,
 The shrivelled miser dines upon his crust.

Thou art a king the record of whose reign
 Bears many a blemish, many a bloody stain;
 Thy foot-stools are the wrecks of mighty thrones,
 Thy palaces are built on human bones;
 Wars are thy sport, but famines please thee best;
 Thy play-things are the hearts of the oppressed.
 Yet millions worship thee,—with trembling limbs
 Kneel round thy shrines and thank thee for thy whims.
 Few dare to question why they kneel; few shrink
 From thee, foul thing! for it were wrong to think!
 Wrong to discard the old, barbarian saws
 And rule the modern world by modern laws!
 With prestige strong and power thou art allied,
 The church and state are ever on thy side.
 Vain is the earnest plea of common sense
 When Custom's bugle blows in thy defense.

But he, whose mournful tale inspires our song,
 Was at the mercy of a frantic throng;
 And fight he must, or, like a lamb, be fleeced—
 The more he fought the more his wealth increased.
 They prosper best who play the meanest role,
 'Tis well in business not to have a soul.

But there were hours, and happy hours were they,
When fireside pleasures made the merchant gay,
When, safe from sordid men's intrigues and snares,
He joined his loved ones and forgot his cares,
Ignored the petty maxims of the mart,
Felt unrestrained and played his proper part.
Pure were his thoughts, and sweet the joys he shared,
When to his rural refuge he repaired.
Dear was that spot where love unfeigned was found
And simple hearts by tender ties were bound;
Dear was his home where smiling Plenty reigned
And dark-browed Sorrow no admittance gained.
There lived his friend, the best he ever knew,
His lovely wife, devoted, kind and true.
His soul was gladdened by her cheering ways
And well she earned a husband's love and praise.
The supper o'er, the bright-eyed girls and boys,
With childish pride, displayed their books and toys,
Rehearsed the little doings of the day,
Told what took place at school and what at play;
And at each droll remark or passing jest
The sire, well pleased, laughed loudly with the rest.
From want his children were, indeed, secure,

No harrowing hardships had they to endure.

Scenes far, far different daily he surveyed
Down in the market where his wealth was made.
The Christian graces were unpracticed there ;
Each man contended for his neighbor's share.
Upheld by vicious statutes, wrong prevailed ;
The rudest triumphed while the gentlest failed.
With feverish zeal one phantom was pursued,
One grovelling passion swayed the multitude.

The merchant paused to reason and, at length,
Grew half ashamed of his reputed strength.
Reflection led him on from point to point,
The world, indeed, was sadly out of joint.
False seemed his life ; once more he worshipped truth,
Once more beheld the visions of his youth,
And oft, in hours of solitude, caressed
A wish that long lay buried in his breast,—
A wish to be of service to mankind
And in their welfare his enjoyment find.

A change came o'er him in his latter days,

The lowly and the poor he strove to raise.
 No longer with indifference could he meet
 Neglected Merit starving on the street,
 No longer listen, with unmoistened eyes,
 To Hunger's plaints or Misery's mournful cries.
 In him the needy met with no disdain,
 They sought his aid and never sought in vain;
 His means were ample and he freely gave;
 His impulse was to succor and to save
 Forgetting self, inspired by lofty aims.
 When debtors could not pay he cancelled claims.

Ambitious now to earn a purer fame
 And loth to profit by another's shame,
 His private gains diminished day by day
 And all his wealth at length was swept away.

When fortune frowned, the fickle, heartless crowd
 Proclaimed the direful news in accents loud;
 And some were pleased, and some were moved to mirth,
 To see their neighbor rudely crushed to earth.

E'en trusted friends their sympathy withdrew

And, in the hour of trial, proved untrue ;
They left him to lament his loss alone,
Their once responsive hearts were turned to stone.

Yet that was fitting in this land of greed
Where men must practice meanness to succeed.
'Tis folly to uplift a fallen friend
Or do a deed that suits no sordid end ;
The finer human feelings are suppressed
And selfish maxims steel the warmest breast ;
And many a kindly word remains unsaid,
And many a gracious tear is never shed.



IV.

The merchant his exalted post resigned
And those who once had flattered now maligned.
Unhelped, uncheered he bore his heavy grief,
For there were none who cared to lend relief.

Down in despair he sank to rise no more,
And now he begs his bread from door to door.
Unfit for toil, unfit for sordid strife,
He totters, feeble, on the edge of life
And feels the bitter pain of wounded pride ;
The wealthy shun him while the poor deride.

Rich is the nation ; spread on every hand
Are the choice products of a teeming land ;
But rarely he enjoys a decent meal,

For food is costly, and he dare not steal;
 While Charity is close, and gives with care,
 And flavors with contempt its scanty fare.

Yes, to the almshouse, refuge of the poor,
 He might retire and, haply, feel secure;
 But pride restrains him; he prefers to roam,
 Nor seeks the shelter of a pauper's home.
 A beggar, stripped of every social right,
 He claims no pity in his mournful plight.

Sad is his fate: At three score years and ten
 A branded outcast spurned by Christian men.
 An outcast he shall draw his latest breath,
 Nor shall the stigma be removed by death;
 No pious-minded priest in due array,
 Shall offer incense o'er his lifeless clay,
 Or, moved to mercy, grant him bliss above,
 Or speak in touching tones sweet words of love.
 To yonder burial-place, abode of shame
 Where lie the dead whose bones no kindred claim,
 The vagrant's relics shall be rudely borne
 And none shall gather round his grave to mourn.

No sorrowing neighbors shall assemble there
 To chant a sacred hymn or kneel in prayer;
 No faithful friends, lamenting, shall appear
 With flowery wreaths to deck the homely bier;
 Not one shall pay a tribute of regard
 Or heave a sympathetic sigh; no bard
 Shall write an epitaph, or sing his praise,
 A pauper's death inspires no pompous lays.

In Potter's Field, ere long, his dust shall rest,
 Returned to earth unhonored and unblest:
 No stone or slab shall mark his lowly bed,
 No flowers adorn the turf above his head.

Where lies the fault? (if fault we wish to find)
 Not with himself, nor wholly with mankind,
 Nor yet with fate. There must be want and woe
 While man is forced to be man's fiercest foe.
 The social structure needs a sounder base;
 Unjust conditions fetter half the race.
 Society alone must bear the blame,
 One child in misery is a nation's shame.



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